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C O N F I D E N T I A L SHENYANG 000163

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/K, EAP/CM, INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS AFTER KOREAN UNIFICATION

TAGS: CH ECON KN KS PREL SCUL

SUBJECT: DPRK: PYONGYANG UNIVERSITY CEREMONY "TUG OF WAR"

REF: SHENYANG 143

Classified By: Consul General Stephen B. Wickman. Reasons 1.4 (b)/(d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The DPRK has apparently retracted invitations to Western media to cover the opening ceremony of the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST) while welcoming PUST's supporters, including South Korean citizens and the ROK media. The ROKG, however, has reportedly barred many of its citizens and all media from attending. The PUST president said he recently received high-level DPRK visitors who expressed concerns about succession issues in North Korea. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) PUST President and Amcit James Chinkyung Kim met briefly with the Consul General and ConGenOff on September 15 prior to leaving for Pyongyang to attend the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST) opening ceremony, to be held in the DPRK capital on September 16.

¶3. (C) President Kim told us that about two weeks ago, the DPRK authorities unexpectedly refused visas for all the Western media correspondents invited to the event although the DPRK left in place its invitation for South Korean media to attend the opening. This was a surprise to President Kim since he had the impression that the DPRK was eager to publicize the event when PUST extended its initial invitations (reftel). President Kim expressed disappointment that the ROK Unification Ministry ultimately declined to approve the participation of any South Korean media or, for that matter, many prominent South Koreans. Kim said that over 100 South Koreans had hoped to make the trip, but the ROKG had pared down the number to roughly 25 individuals.

¶4. (C) President Kim theorized that the Imjin River dam incident had made it politically impossible for the ROKG to authorize the travel despite the DPRK's expectation that, at a time of increased North-South activities, the South Koreans would indeed attend. He also reported that the ROKG had pulled the plug on a PUST shipment of desks and other furniture from Incheon to Nampo. Despite the DPRK's apparent desire for South Korean attention, President Kim noted once again that the DPRK preferred that professors taking up residence at PUST be non-South Korean or, preferably, of non-Korean ancestry.

¶5. (C) President Kim's delegation is taking a USD 50,000 Air Koryo charter from Shenyang to Pyongyang on September 15 and will return to Shenyang on September 17. After the opening ceremony, PUST plans to send a team of professors to settle in at the university by November in hopes of beginning instruction by spring 2010. Two Korean-American professors who used to work for Bechtel are already resident in

Pyongyang and are working in earnest on a curriculum for a just-approved MBA course as well as other offerings.

¶6. (C) While President Kim has been known to get somewhat carried away with his embellishments, he claimed to us that three high-level DPRK officials had recently visited him at his offices in Yanji on three separate occasions to make similar points about their concerns on succession issues. First, they said Kim Jong-il's third son, Kim Jong-woon, has clearly been chosen as the successor. Second, because Kim Jong-woon had spent most of his life overseas, many in the North Korean leadership questioned how a foreign-raised and -educated person could lead North Korea. Third, though Kim Jong-woon was the nominal successor, these individuals and many in Pyongyang's elite were worried about how the actual succession events would play out in the event of Kim Jong-il's death. Finally, they expressed their support for PUST as a possible bridge to the elite segment of the society. In a similar vein, President Kim claimed to have helped in the process of persuading the DPRK to release the two captured American journalists.

WICKMAN